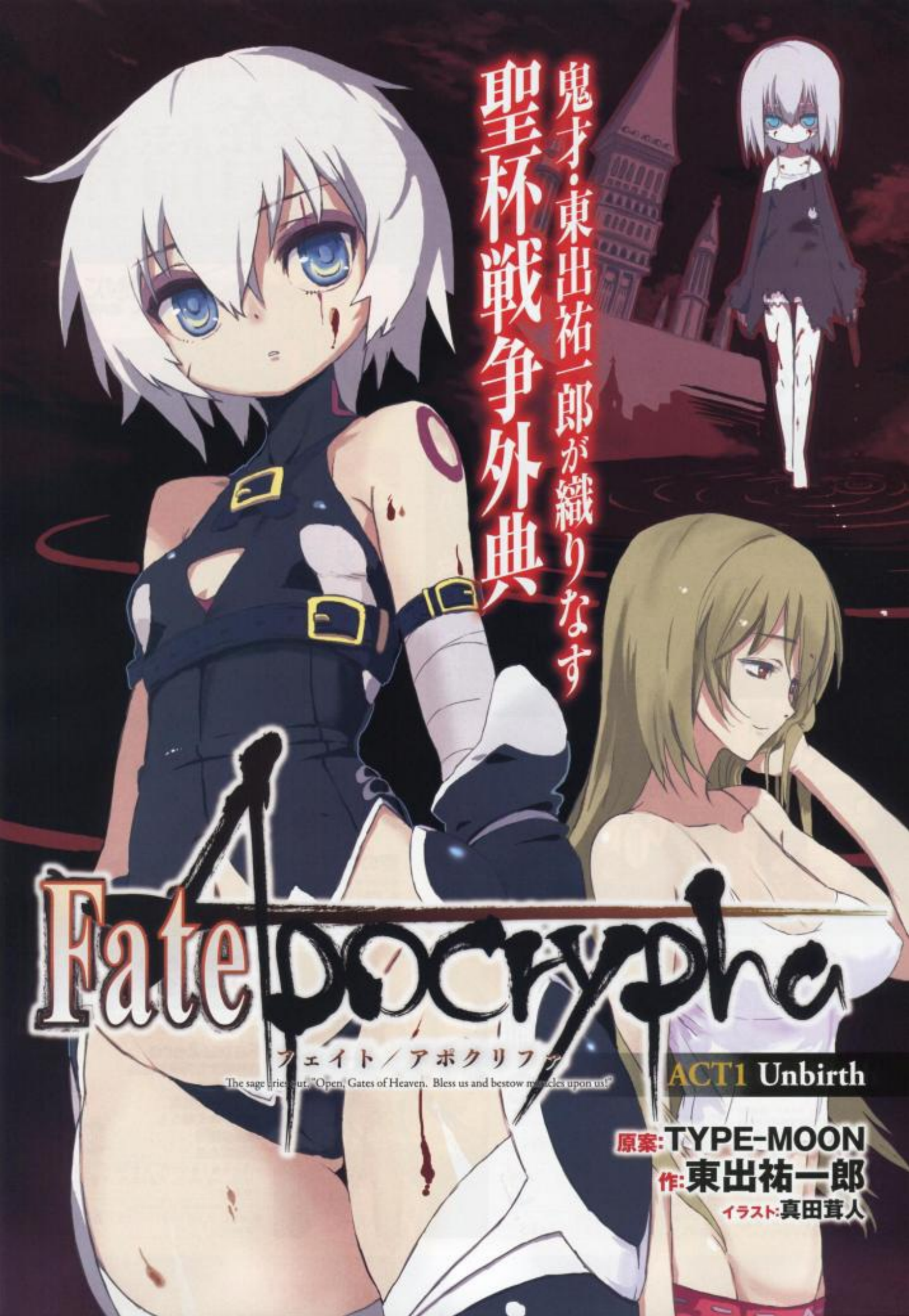
鬼才・東出祐一郎が織りなす
聖杯戦争外典
Fate Apocrypha
フェイト／アポクリファ
The sage cries out, "Open, Gates of Heaven. Bless us and bestow miracles upon us!"
ACT1 Unbirth
原案:TYPE-MOON
作:東出祐一郎
イラスト:真田茸人

Act 1 - Unbirth

The sage cries out. "Open, Gate of Heaven. Bless us and bestow miracles upon us!"

*

-- It was a place endlessly surrounded by cravings.

Gluttony and lust bring forth avariciousness and a hunger for fame, in turn bringing forth violence and cajolery. Everyone gladly threw themselves into this endless hell.

The women sell their bodies, the men sell their violence.

The men sell their bodies, the women sell their honor.

Laughing, and being laughed at; devouring, and being devoured; jeering, and being jeered at; harming, and being harmed; violating, and being violated.

This is Shinjuku.

A place that only truly shone in the darkness of night.

A never-before-seen, and never-again-shall-be, battle royale between magi who had attained the qualifications of 'Master' and heroes summoned as 'Servant' -- that is the Holy Grail War.

A magus who had qualified and was now preparing to join the battle was here in Shinjuku as well.

However, he still had a dilemma.

...He could not summon his Servant.

On the roof of a multi-tenant building, a magic circle was drawn *in human blood*.

The etched circle glittered crimson -- and abruptly, as though something had

been cut off, the light was lost.

"...It's not working."

The man dropped his shoulders in disappointment.

Before his eyes were four strangely-shaped knives and two butcher's knives.

It was a symbol to summon the Servant.

Using the six blades favored by that 'serial killer', the magus attempted to summon the Servant -- and failed.

"This isn't enough. Yeah, it's totally not enough."

Generally, having an item with an affinity to the Heroic Spirit will suffice in summoning a specific Servant.

For example, *the sheath of the holy sword once wielded by the King of Knights*.

Or perhaps *the fossil of cast skin from the first snake in the world to shed its skin*.

If you could prepare something like that, drawing a specific Servant is comparatively easier.

However, there existed two points which led to the failure of the summoning this time.

One was the caliber of the man as a magus. In this Holy Grail War, entirely unlike the Fourth, there are *fourteen* magi who become Masters. By necessity, there are also fourteen Servants. It is double the norm.

Following this, the Grail that originally would support the summoning can only exert half its strength, and the rest must be made up for by the magus.

And regrettably, the man was nothing more than a second-rate magus.

Another point was how weak the Heroic Spirit the man had been trying to summon was.

He was weak, though merely in terms of belief.

The Servant the man had been trying to summon was an existence from

merely one hundred twenty years ago.

Despite his fame, he was not one who could match those who were worshiped as gods and heroes.

In short, what was needed -- was a push, by any means necessary.

"Now what should I do...?"

As he lamented, the man scratched his head.

After a moment, he thought of a good idea. These six weapons were specialized blades used practically for one 'deed'.

In that case -- when would these weapons exercise their most proper function?

The answer was, obviously, when they were being practically used.

He will create a situation where these lethal weapons can be practically used -- if he can do this, the connection with the Servant should become strong enough for a summoning.

"So basically, I need a woman."

The man picked someone suitable for the role immediately.

There was a woman who sold her body to make a living. That was exactly what the woman currently by his side did, wasn't it? She was originally just a woman on whom he had cast a suggestion when he infiltrated this city. He had no hesitations in treating her as something disposable.

"...All right, let's do it."

As he incinerated the magic circle and left the building, the man's eyes switched from cold ones belonging to a magus to ones reminding you of a warm and innocent young man.

A host was his profession, his working name "Hikaru". The magus, true name Sagara Hyouma, melted away into the city of cravings -- practically perfectly.

*

To Rikudou Reika, the sounds of the heart were strange.

As her heart thumped, she lived. Without this sound, her brain, organs and limbs would be dead.

This fist-sized organ, sounding as though this small sound was all that it could manage, allowed one to live.

Reika could not help but feel it strange.

One does not live, but is allowed to live by the heart.

Hazily thinking such things -- that was how she spent her life, simply being swept along.

She still did not know what the purpose of her life was.

Perhaps it was because she did not have a family.

Perhaps it was because she had been abused before she was adopted.

Perhaps it was because she could not do anything when she was a child.

.....Reika knew nothing.

However, even if she did not know, a human being cannot survive without making money.

Even Reika knew this, so for the present, she decided to live on by selling her body.

Fortunately, she had never had trouble with a client.

Why did someone like her, passed by and suddenly hit on by a host on the streets, so easily agreed to live together with him -- knowing that she would be exploited?

Reika did not know why she did that, but it hurt her head to think, so she stopped.

Sagara Hyouma was kind.

At least, he did not use violence against her. The most he had ever done was ask for small sums of money.

Even when he did this, he did not threaten violence. He simply requested.

For some reason, she could not defy his requests -- she could never even have

the intent to.

She did not quite understand, but perhaps this was the thing called "love".

Reika would think of this in that way. She would think of this, and be happy.

One day, the man may wake up by himself.

Or perhaps he may continue their love.

Marriage? Childbirth? A family? Or perhaps, divorce?

Both being far off into the future, they were a bother for Reika to think about.

She did not know what will happen in her life during the coming days, but at least, she will be allowed to live to the next day -- so Reika thought.

And she knew that this was wrong.

*

"Heeeey. Reika. Are you listening to me?"

Feeling the tap on her face, Reika turned her lightly-colored eyes to the man.

When she tried to stand up, she found that something was preventing her from doing so.

Her ankles were tied with a cord.

"...What, is this?"

Reika posed a question to Hyouma, the man she had been living with.

Hyouma looked down on her with cold eyes, ones that she had never seen him wear before.

-- Yes, these eyes,

Reika knew them. These were the eyes of one who would use violence. *They were eyes that regarded the one before them as being a worthless existence.*

But, why this, all of a sudden...?

Even though she loved him. Even though she still loved him.

"It won't work unless I re-enact it."

His soft voice, unexpectedly, made Reika felt as though her entire body froze.

"Re, enact?"

"Yes. Re-enacting the scene of the crime. I'm afraid that's what is needed to summon *him*. I need to *cut a woman like you to pieces using his knives*."

"What.....?"

In order to withstand violence, you simply need to force your heart into a state of temporal death.

That was what she had always done, and what she had planned to do this time as well.

However, Hyouma just said that he would cut her to pieces.

-- What was that supposed to mean?

-- What was the meaning in cutting her to pieces?

"All right. Magic circle complete."

The stench of blood, which any resident of Shinjuku would be used to smelling, made Reika's heart pound as she faced death.

Not noticing the change in Reika, Hyouma raised his right hand, which had a strange tattoo, and began to chant strange words.

"Fill. Fill. Fill. Fill. Fill. Let each be turned over five times, simply breaking asunder the fulfilled time."

It's like an spell, thought Reika.

In spite of the lack of any particularly disturbing content, a scream began to rise inside Reika.

"Let silver and steel be the essence. Let stone and the archduke of contracts be the foundation. Let my great master ¦¦¦¦¦¦¦¦ be the ancestor. Raise a wall, against the wind that shall fall. Close the four cardinal gates. Come out from the crown. Rotate the three-branched road reaching the Kingdom."

Hyouma took up a knife in his hand.

"Please don't..."

Her sense of foreboding turning into a conviction, Reika spoke with a shaking

voice as she shook her head.

Hyouma did not reply.

The tip of the knife traced Reika's body, as though lost.

However, he was not hesitating, but deciding *where to strike*.

It would be meaningless to finish her off with a single blow.

He had to re-enact those brutal killings, so he needed to slaughter her in the most painful way possible.

Finally, Hyouma decided where to stab.

"-- I shall declare here.

Your body shall serve under me. My fate shall be with your sword.

Submit to the beckoning of the Holy Grail. If you will submit to this will and this reason..... then answer!"

Hyouma shouted, and raised the knife up high.

Reika's right arm sent her a shock.

"......Huh?"

A second late, the pain assaulted her, and Reika screamed.

An enormous heat scorched her body, centered on the knife that had stabbed into her.

"It... hurts... it hurts...!"

All the times when she had been beaten before were nothing compared to this intense pain.

"-- An oath shall be sworn here!"

Another knife stabbed her in the abdomen this time.

"...ah.....!"

There was no shock, unlike the first.

But the pain multiplied.

Reika, feeling her life flowing away from her, screamed.

Words, ones that she had never thought of in her entire life, overwhelmed her.

"I shall attain all virtues of all of Heaven. I shall have dominion over all evils of all of Hell!"

He aimed for and stabbed her upper left shoulder.

At last, the voice that had screamed for him to stop could no longer make a sound.

"-- From the Seventh Heaven, attended to by three great words of power, come forth from the ring of restraint, Protector of the Balance!"

A knife hovered above her head.

In an instant, she understood that she will die. Fear exploded in her, coursing through her entire body.

No. I don't want this.

She never wanted to die like this, in such wanton cruelty, and such despair.

How many seconds of reprieve did she have until that knife was swung down?

Must she now accept her death, within a span of less than ten seconds?

No.

I'll never want that.

I don't want to, I don't, no, no no no no no no no no no no no no no -- !

"No...!"

As such, Reika went beyond her own limit.

A knife had been driven through her right palm and into the concrete floor. She grasped the blade with her pierced hand.

Gathering all the strength in her body, she pulled it out and thrust it at Hyouma's face.

Having been enduring the pain of the spell, he stopped the incantation and screamed as pain suddenly assaulted him from the outside.

"Bitch...!"

Spewing out sounds that no longer formed into words, Reika brandished the knife again.

Hyouma glared at her with hate and let off a strong kick at the pit of her stomach.

Unlike the pain of having a knife sticking into her, this was a shock that suspended her vital activities. Reika tumbled to the edge of the magic circle. She was, if anything, vividly conscious, perhaps due to her intense pain.

There was no change in the magic circle. It did not even glow.

"Does it have to be five people, then...? Or do I have to go and kill thirteen? Shit. This is such a pain."

Hyouma stamped his feet as he tore at his hair.

Blood spilled from Reika's mouth as she watched.

"Ka, ah..."

Her heart continued to operate, accelerating in order to allow the existence called Rikudou Reika to live on.

However, the pain had long ago breached the limit permissable by humans.

Little by little, she knew that her bodily senses were being lost.

However, she could not feel any relief from the fact that she will no longer suffer.

Reika's life was flowing out of her with every second.

She didn't know why she had lived.

She didn't know why she was allowed to live.

Crushing down the doubts she had had for many years, she gave forth a single answer.

-- I want to live.

She simply wanted to live on. She did not want to die. She did not want to die in such pain.

Having despaired at life, she embraced the first craving she had ever had as she

faced death.

She wanted to live because she wanted to.

She didn't want to die because she didn't want to.

That was simply it, and nothing else.

Yes -- what a simple, clear truth it was.

"I don't... want to... die."

A single drop dripped onto the magic circle.

In the next instant, an incredible tempest swept out from the center of the circle.

Hyouma could sense it. It was an outrageous swirl of prana -- journeying through all obstacles, *an uncommon monster will make its advent* into this reality!

"...Is this... did I do it?!"

The voice of the magus shook with joy.

-- You want to live, right?

It was the lovely, and very clear, voice of a young girl.

The voice spoke, not to Hyouma, but to Reika alone.

Without the slightest hesitation, Reika replied to the voice.

-- I want to live.

Reika made her wish. She clung on to it desperately.

The girl whispered with a sweetly ringing voice.

-- Okay. We understand. Let us make our contract, *Mother*.

The magic circle activated, and prana accompanied by fierce crimson light was released.

Reika was captivated by the fantastical scene before her and Hyouma, unlike before, expressed his delight with an assured response.

"...Did it work? It did! All right, I did it!"

The clear voice of the girl reached Hyouma as he danced around.

"Question -- are you the one who called for us?"

Hyouma was dumbfounded by the voice which was so far beyond his expectations.

After all, he had been extremely sure that the most famous killer of all *couldn't possibly be a young girl*.

"Wha? Huh? Did I do something wrong...?"

Hyouma was bewildered by the girl that came out from the circle. Her silver hair was dense and rather short and her pale, ice-blue eyes gazed at the magus disinterestedly.

The girl shook her head and declared.

"No, there is no mistake.

You summoned us. We are what you have sought."

"So that means, you're..."

"Yes. What you had attempted to summon was the Servant Assassin. Our true name -- is 'Jack the Ripper'."

Hyouma's face shone with joy.

"I got it... I drew the right one!"

Hyouma, as a magus, understood that he was not a type suited to combat.

The magecraft his house had passed on generation after generation was specialized in unspectacular powers such as suggestion and concealment, and they ended up being ridiculed as "rats".

However, a rat can kill in ratlike ways, and Hyouma was proud of his tactics.

Of the way he fought, fierce like a sewer rat, cunning, and tenacious.

In order for him to win the Holy Grail War, Servants which fought with great fanfare -- like the so-called primary classes such as Saber or Lancer, or the powerful but uncontrollable Berserker must be avoided.

Even considering his own rank as a magus, he did not believe that he could put them to any work, nor could he allow them to fully exercise their strengths.

Assassin was the most fitting Servant for him. There was no mistaking it.

However, the Heroic Spirit which must be summoned as Assassin was fixed. This would also mean that, as soon as one's own Servant is known to be Assassin, countermeasures can be worked out.

Following on this, Hyouma sought a completely unknown Servant -- or at least one that had never participated in the Grail War before.

A serial killer with little history while possessing the 'monstrosity' befitting a Heroic Spirit.

In other words, Jack the Ripper.

Hyouma jumped for joy and tried to rush over to Jack. However, she spun around, turned her back to Hyouma, and knelt beside the pitiful living sacrifice, Reika.

"Are you all right, *Mother*?"

When the girl addressed her, two sounds seemed to somehow overlap. It was a strange sound, as though she pronounced both "Master" and "Mother" at the same time.

"Huh? W-Whoa, wait. Hold on. Hey."

The girl took no notice of Hyouma's call to stop.

"Please wait. We'll help you now. It's okay. It's going to be all right."

"It hurts..."

"We're sorry, *Mother*. Please hold on for a bit longer."

Jack gently stroke Reika's hair with affection, and turned to face Hyouma once again.

"...You are Servant Assassin. Your true name is 'Jack the Ripper'... that's right, isn't it?"

Jack nodded shortly at Hyouma's words, without any of her endearing gestures.

So far so good, but to Hyouma, the problems were just beginning.

"You are *my* Servant, aren't you?"

The ice-blue eyes flashed like jewels.

Peered at by those lovely, pure and inhuman eyes, Hyouma could not help but become afraid.

The three command spells were carved into the back of his hand.

He felt as though if he hadn't had those, he would have lost sight of himself as a magus.

The one who summoned her was the magus called Sagara Hyouma.

That was how it should be, but somehow -- he could not help but feel as

though he was standing in enemy territory.

Jack, without answering Hyouma's question, picked up her symbol -- the strangely-shaped knife that was lying on the floor.

This simple act accelerated Hyouma's heartbeat.

"Answer me, Assassin. Whose -- Servant are you?"

"It's inconvenient being a magus, isn't it?"

Jack suddenly murmured.

"Perhaps not small spells, but when it comes to big spells, you have to put it into words, don't you?"

"What, about it?"

"Even worse, if you have to execute a command spell, you can't just wish for it. After all, *the wish won't be granted unless you put it into proper words*."

In an instant, his survival instinct gave him a strong alert.

This Servant was dangerous.

This Servant regarded him as an adverse enemy which needed to be eliminated.

"I call upon you with the command spell --"

He felt as though something blazing hot was stuffed into his mouth.

When he ignored it and tried to order her to "commit suicide", he noticed, -- his jaw, was gone.

" ------ !!"

The words he wanted to cry did not come out. The only speech he could manage was a ridiculous breathing sound.

"And you don't need this, either."

His wrist received a shock.

In violent pain, with his blood discharging as though from a bottomless bucket, Hyouma fell into a panic at once.

" ------ !! -- ! -- ! --- !!"

Even so, he could not speak.

At this moment Sagara Hyouma, having lost his capability of speech, was less than a rat, simply reduced to a piece of meat.

Having confirmed this, Jack walked over to Reika once again.

"We'll fix you now. It... might be a bit uncomfortable. We're sorry."

The girl informed her, deeply apologetic.

Perhaps it was because of how sorry she looked.

Perhaps it was because of how her expression was filled with so much concern for her.

"...It's all right."

Reika murmured and lost consciousness.

*

-- When she awoke again, the nauseous agony had disappeared from her.

But there was a wrongness to her entire body that she could not shake off.

The bindings at her feet had been undone. Reika stood up, looked at her right hand, and frowned.

The wound on her right hand had been stitched up, but by methods which were somewhat too crude. A black thread creeped about haphazardly like an earthworm, and it was dubious whether the wound had really been closed.

But the blood had stopped... and she was no longer in pain.

"Well, I guess it's fine as long as it doesn't hurt."

"Yes. Not hurting is good."

The voice came from right beside her. Turning around, she found the girl from before watching her steadily with an expression of childish innocence. Reika faced the girl again, and talked to her.

"Um, you were the one who saved me, right?"

"Yes, that's right. We did."

"'We'?"

"Yes. We are one, and one is all."

"I'm sorry, I don't really understand. Um, what was your name again?"

"Jack the Ripper. Jack is fine, or Assassin."

"Hmm... those don't sound like girl's names."

"Mm..."

Seeing the crestfallen Jack, Reika hurriedly continued.

"But Jack has a pretty ring to it. Can I call you Jack?"

"Yep."

" -- Now. I'd like to know exactly what happened. Can you explain it to me, Jack?"

"We can. But it's dangerous here, so let's move somewhere else."

"Yes, I understand. Oh, but -- what should we do about Hyouma?"

Reika tilted her head to one side, looking at the thing that used to be a person which was taking ghastly, wheezing breathes. There was no blood flowing from his lost jaw or his wrist. Like Reika's right hand, they had been sewn up with a chaotic surgical method.

"Let's bring him with us. He might become necessary later."

Jack lifted Hyouma up without much effort.

"Please bring us to your house, *Mother*. We will follow."

"Oh, um, but..."

Reika glanced at Hyouma as Jack carried him. For a start, anyone who saw a person with their right hand and lower jaw cut off would report it.

Perhaps detecting her unease, Jack shook her head quickly from side to side.

"It's okay, it's okay."

"It's okay?"

"Yep. No one will know, no one will know."

In the end, as Jack said, no fault could be found with the appearance of the girl.

Reika, walking ahead by herself, would sometimes turn around to look, but she could not locate Jack.

And yet when she called out "Jack", she was answered by "What is it?"

It was mysterious, but with so many incomprehensible things happening recently, she could not be bothered to point this out, and walked back to her own apartment at leisure.

She led Jack to the kitchen and made some tea.

"Thank you, *Mother*."

As always, it was a strange method of address, as though overlapping the words "Master" and "Mother".

"Where should we start?"

"Hmm... how about from the beginning?"

"Okay. We will explain as much as we can."

*

-- Jack the Ripper talked of the 'Holy Grail War' in a simplified manner to Reika, who had no magical knowledge.

The Holy Grail, able to realize any and all miracles, had been re-enacted by a group of great magi. However, the Grail would grant the wish of only one.

A Master chosen by the Holy Grail is granted a Vessel for the Grail and Command Spells. After that, one had to summon a Heroic Spirit, the Servant, and use it to win and survive.

All Servants have their own special characteristics... Jack the Ripper is in the class of Assassin.

And, most likely, Reika was chosen by Hyouma as a living sacrifice in order to summon her.

The Grail, magi, Servants... she took in all the preposterous-sounding things that Jack spoke of.

"I see. So Jack, are you really Hyouma's Servant?"

"That was the original plan, we think. But just as we were about to be summoned as a Servant, we were drawn by words more powerful than his."

-- I want to live. I don't want to die. I'll never accept a death like this.

Reika wished strongly for the thing necessary to overturn the pursuing death that had been close at hand.

That prayer was granted by Jack -- as a result, she arrived, summoned not as a Servant of Hyouma but of Reika.

This was quite likely an event without any precedent.

As long as the Command Spells exist, the summoning of the Servant is a comparatively simple ritual in and of itself. One simply needed to draw the magic circle and chant the spell -- and sometimes, the situation may be that even the spell is unnecessary. If one wishes to draw a specific Servant, one should simply prepare a symbol with an affinity to the Heroic Spirit.

The summoning also takes an exceedingly short time. While the summoning of a Heroic Spirit is a great ritual, with the backing of the Holy Grail, little time is needed.

Thus -- it was doubtful whether a third party had ever managed to interfere in a situation like this before.

To say nothing of how said third party, for the sake of avoiding an impending death, had made a prayer with greater resolution than the summoner. Everything about the contract between Jack and Reika was an utter anomaly.

As Jack briefly explained about topics such as the Servant classes and special characteristics, she took out the thing she had crammed into her bag and put it on the table.

"So, *Mother*. We wanted to talk to you about this."

"Oh, my."

Reika reflexively covered her mouth with a hand.

It was Hyouma's right hand. What appeared to be a tattoo imitating three knives was carved on its back.

"These are the Command Spells. They normally appear on the arm of the magus who would become the Master... um, they're like tickets for giving orders."

"Oh..."

Reika touched the back of the stiffened hand in a nervous manner.

"He's still alive, so it's still functioning... is he here?"

"Mmm..."

In all honesty, Reika could think of nothing that she would need to order Jack for. However, the power of the Command Spells was immense, yet something that could be manipulated even by Reika. It could be used as a trump card to reverse an overwhelmingly disadvantageous situation.

"If he dies, the Command Spells will disappear as well. That would be a waste, so we should keep it around, we think."

"That's true. I don't want to be hurt... but I don't to waste anything, either.

Well, would you please?"

"Yep, okay. We're not too good at transplant operations, but we'll do our best."

For whatever reason, Reika felt like stroking the head of the bashful Jack. The girl accepted it happily.

*

The transfer took an hour.

Despite the fact that it had been cut off, Hyouma wept in anguish when the Command Spells were forcibly torn off. Was his sense of pain still connected? Or was it from his despair that his qualification as a Master in the Grail War -- that his aspiration had been lost to him?

In either case, Hyouma had just lost his last chance to survive.

During the transfer, Reika's hand hurt as though it was burnt, but the pain soon disappeared. It still felt hot and ached a little, but that gradually lessened as well.

"Now, the Vessel of the Grail."

"Is this Grail something like a wine-glass?"

"No, anything can work as the Vessel. Any object close at hand will automatically be acknowledged as a Vessel of the Grail."

As though these words caused her to suddenly remember something, Reika asked.

"Hyouma. When you lived here, wasn't there something you had with you that was really important?"

Hyouma stiffened.

"Hmm, I'm sure... yes, it's this."

Reika was holding a ruby larger than her hand.

"Is this it?"

"Wow, that's amazing... *this is the first time we've seen a mineralized heart*."

"A, A heart?"

Hearing this, Reika nearly dropped it without thinking.

Jack's eyes were wide with curiosity and surprise.

"Yep, it's a human heart. That's brilliant. Was it a curse? Or some kind of sickness?"

"So is this the Holy Grail?"

Jack sniffed the jewel and nodded.

"Yes, this is it. No doubt about it."

*

She had made a contract with a Servant, had Command Spells transferred to her, and obtained a Vessel.

Rikudou Reika had become a Master in name as well as reality, and was in a position to use Servant Assassin.

"So *Mother*, what will you do? In the Grail War?"

"Hm, right. My wish has already been granted, after all."

To live -- that was what she had first wished for, and it had been granted.

That would mean she had returned to her original self.

The one who lived vaguely, simply being swept along.

"Ah... is there a wish you want granted, Jack?"

"...Yes, there is."

Jack's expression darkened. The way she held the cup of tea with both hands and sipped from it was rather cute, thought Reika absentmindedly.

"We want to go back to our mother."

"Back to your mother?"

"Yes. We want to *go back inside* our mother. It's so very comfortable there."

"I see."

Regardless of its contents, it seemed Jack had a wish.

It was an important wish that she wanted to have granted, no matter who she had to bring down to do so.

Reika, having not wished for anything, could not deny her -- nor did she think she was qualified to.

"So we'll have to join the War, then."

"...Can we?"

"Oh, yes. You saved me, after all."

It was a wish that couldn't have possibly been granted.

It was a situation where being killed would have been a matter of course.

The only thing she could use to repay this girl who had completely overturned all of this would be herself.

"I don't want to get hurt, though."

"Don't worry, it won't hurt... we think."

"All right. Well then, let us wage war."

Jack nodded, her eyes twinkling.

"Yep, let's wage a war!"

"So... what should I do? I can't fight."

"Well, *Mother*, we require prana to fight."

The existence of a Servant in itself consumes an enormous amount of prana, though Jack, as an Assassin, is less draining compared to a Saber or Berserker.

Even so, as Rikudou Reika was an amateur, not even being a magus, there was little likelihood of her becoming the main prana supply.

In that case, prana will need to be replenished from other sources...

"Eating human souls would do for us."

"Human souls? Um, would that kill them?"

"...Yes, we suppose."

"Hmm... I guess it can't be helped."

"Oh, um, but, having only bad people would be best. It might be just us, but a bad person's soul is more polluted and delicious."

The nature of Jack the Ripper is chaotic evil.

She is an existence that preaches chaos in the face of order, carrying out evil deeds. Thus, it would seem that souls of the same nature are *more easily digested*.

"I see. So... would Hyouma taste good?"

When Reika pointed at Hyouma, Jack bobbed her head up and down.

"Yep. He's a magus too, so he would be delicious."

Telling her to wait a moment, Reika walked over to Hyouma with the cut right hand.

She crouched down, their eyes meeting as he cowered.

"Did you love me, Hyouma?"

" -- ¦ ¦¦¦! ¦ ¦¦¦!"

Reika smiled when Hyouma nodded and cried out.

"I'm not sure what you mean, but it sounds like you did. Thank you. You probably cast some sort of magecraft on me, didn't you? I don't hold that against you. After all, it's thanks to you that I got to know the wonderful feeling of loving someone."

Reika gently pressed the right hand to her cheek.

"Yes, that's right. I did love you after all. But you betrayed me, so it can't be helped. It really can't. I'm sorry. You'll live on *as a precious memory*."

" -- ¦¦! ¦ ¦¦¦¦ ¦¦¦ ¦¦ ¦¦¦ ¦¦¦¦¦¦ ¦¦¦¦!"

With a bitter smile saying that she did not understand, Reika announced to Jack.

"You can eat him. Oh, but I'd prefer it if you didn't dirty the place... eat him in the bathroom."

Reika had no profound emotions as to the fact that she had been allowed to live.

.....Similarly, she *felt no hesitation in erasing someone she couldn't care less about*.

A mother would grieve for the death of her child.

A lover would grieve for the death of her beloved.

If no one would be faulted for not grieving for her -- *then she couldn't care less either*.

Watching over Hyouma as his entire body jerked about, desperately struggling to survive, Reika calmly poured herself another cup of tea.

Disposing of the withered corpse was easier than she had thought it would be.

Having been crushed down, the thing she stuffed into the garbage bag did not

look like a living being at all, and resembled nothing but a large amount of dead leaves.

There wasn't even the stench of blood. Only the right hand, with its Command Spells ripped off, preserved its freshness. The only thing she had to remember him by was this hand. I will treasure it, Reika thought.

"You don't like the smell of blood, do you, *Mother*?"

"No, not really."

"So we sucked all his blood, too. Slurp. It tasted bad, though."

"Oh, I'm sorry. You didn't have to do that for me."

Jack shook her head from side to side.

"Oh, no, if *Mother* is happy, we are happy."

"I see."

"Well... we will be happy if you would pat our head, too."

Following Jack's modest request, Reika stroked her head.

"Is this okay?"

"Yes. Thank you, *Mother*."

The bashful girl was so very childish -- so much so that it was almost unthinkable that she had just murdered a man a short time ago.

"I'd like to rest for a bit now. Is that all right?"

"Yep. Good night. Don't worry. We will protect you, *Mother*."

"Yes, thank you, Jack."

As would be expected, fatigue was setting in on her.

As soon as she laid down on her bed and closed her eyes, Reika fell unconscious at once.

*

And, she dreamed.

The first thing she felt was a rending, gouging cold.

A thick mist covered her surroundings, and every time she took a breath it felt as though poison was seeping into her body.

Looking at her own hand, she was shocked to discover that she was awfully thin, and understood that she had somehow *become Jack*.

Jack was peeking through the window of a house.

Inside the dreary room, a woman was laughing.

The woman laughed, and indulged herself in alcohol. Her heart and body worn down, she had become an existence that simply struggled to live day by day.

She had no dreams.

The only thing that existed to her was reality.

However, it was clear that her reality had been crushed by her inescapable fate. She suffered from poverty and it was matter of whether she would die from starvation or disease.

Reika looked on from outside the window, together with Jack.

...No, perhaps not.

What Reika saw in the middle-aged woman through the window was her inescapable despair.

She despaired at how she had no way to escape it except by drinking, she despaired at how she did not even know if she would have food tomorrow, and she despaired at her own lack of dreams.

However, Jack -- saw in her only "Mother".

"Mother."

The girl whispered in a small voice.

As though she were a parrot, she whispered it again and again.

"Mother, mother, mother, mother, mother."

She knocked on the window, softly, incessantly.

The woman, apparently noticing at last, scowled as she opened the window.

"Quiet!"

Flinging this out with a witch-like expression, she shut the window with a bang.

Perhaps the girl was aware that she would be rejected. She hanged her head and kept back the tears.

And so, with nothing to do -- she wandered the night street.

There were laughing voices, charming voices, shouts and screams.

Voices, voices, voices, voices. All of them, voices that would never mourn *them*.

How far had she walked? The girl suddenly stopped her feet.

"Mother."

The woman from before was standing by herself, waiting for a client. A man walked up to her, but it seemed they could not agree to a price, as the man spat and went off.

"Mother."

..Abruptly, the mist thickened.

Reika knew this was something like magecraft -- but the woman, of course, did not. She simply seemed perplexed by the sudden thickening of the mist.

In the girl's hand was a single knife.

"Mother."

The woman, waving her hands about in the mist, did not notice the girl approaching her at all.

She stood before the woman.

"Mother."

The woman cried out, twitching with fear, at her call. However, she seemed to have noticed that the one before her was the girl from before. The woman, her expression mixed with relief and anger, said.

"Don't scare me!"

"I'm sorry."

Who would know -- what this apology was meant for.

The girl briskly cut open the throat of the woman from side to side.

Who would understand, who would believe,

that the true form of Jack the Ripper, the legendary serial killer who knew of dissection and slipped into the darkness of night to perform his quiet dissections, was such a pitiful girl?

"I'm sorry, *Mother*. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But I want to go back. I want to go back. I want to go back, I want to go back --"

With miserable tears, the girl dissected the anguishing Mother.

Finally obtaining a part of the woman, the girl pressed the thing that smelt of blood against her face, and cried.

-- Go back, go back, we want to go back.

-- After all, it is so warm. It is so very warm here.

The lamentations of the girl reached no one.

She despaired, and faded away without achieving her dream. Was she killed? Did she choose death? Did she simply pass away? -- no one knew.

It is likely that she will perpetually reign as an eternal mystery, an eternal darkness carved into the history of England.

She was no longer a simple killer.

She was one had obtained from others the belief known as fear -- a "Reverse Heroic Spirit".

*

She woke from her dream.

For a moment, Reika was confused by the fact that she was sleeping on her own bed.

After clearing her consciousness, she grasped that what had happened before was a dream --

"But it felt so real."

She did not believe that she can recreate 19th-century London to that degree

with her mind alone, it being a place she had never been to, much less know about.

It likely had something to do with the fact that she had made a contract with a Servant.

Thinking this, Reika searched for her Servant, Jack the Ripper.

"Jack...?"

When she looked carefully, she noticed a big bulge in the sheets. She turned over the sheets gently, so as not to disturb it, and found Jack curled up there, hugging her knees and quietly sleeping.

"Oh my."

Feeling she ought not to wake her up, Reika stroked Jack's head softly. She had no regular work in the first place, so she could use her time freely.

There was no need for her to worry.

Even if she was awake, there was nothing she had to do in the morning.

"...Just a bit longer."

Murmuring this, Reika put her arms around Jack's head and closed her eyes again.

*

When it became night, Reika went out into the streets with Jack.

Jack explained to Reika about a technique called 'spirit form' that completely erases her from view.

"Is it different from what you used last night?"

Jack answered, "That's right.

"What we used yesterday was the 'presence concealment' skill of the Assassin class. We didn't disappear, we just erased our presence. We can't carry anything while in Spirit Form."

"I couldn't see you at all. Did you really just erase your presence?"

"That's just the sort of creature we killers are. We're confident that not even a Servant can ever detect us as long as it's nighttime."

Despite the fact that she could not see Jack, Reika felt that the girl was puffing up slightly in pride.

"But *Mother*, are there really lots of bad people?"

"Oh, yes. Um, it should be in this building... was it this floor?"

Reika got a confirmation from the name-plates that showed each floor.

"Akagami Finance Co. -- right, it's here. It's the fourth floor."

"Everyone on the fourth floor?"

"Yes. It's all right, the entire floor is filled with people from this company."

"Well, let's go in unseen then, *Mother*."

When she reached the fourth floor by elevator, Reika did as Jack instructed and moved to the women's washroom first.

"What are you going to do?"

"Use our Noble Phantasm."

"'Noble Phantasm'...?"

"The secret skills of Servants -- us."

Jack materialized her body. She was gripping an antique lantern in her hand.

"What is that?"

"This is our Bounded Field Noble Phantasm: '*The Mist*'."

Servants are heroes from ancient times, and their tales revolve around certain weapons and tools, big and small.

-- A holy sword of light, forged in the planet.

-- A demonic spear which pierces the heart without exception through the reversal of causality.

-- Reins which control beasts from the Age of Gods.

The lantern Jack holds is one of these.

"Have you ever heard of 'the Smoke', *Mother*?"

"I have. That means London, doesn't it?"

"Yes. When we were there, the smog in London was horrible. It was pitch black -- so bad that we couldn't breathe, so bad we couldn't open our eyes."

The mixture of smoke and fog released during the burning of coal is called smog.

From the 19th to the 20th century, London had been harassed by smog countless times.

The worst of all was the Great Smog of 1952. It was said that the thick mist of

sulfur covering London caused over 10,000 deaths.

Jack opened the shutter of the lantern, and gently touched the candle inside.

A flame was lit and at the same time, something like smoke began to leak out from the bottom of the lantern.

"This Noble Phantasm can recreate that mist.

No one can ever escape it. They'll die in agony, all of them."

A troubled expression appeared on Reika's face.

"Um... Jack?

Wouldn't I die too, then? I'd prefer it if that didn't happen."

A flustered Jack shook her head from side to side.

"I-It's all right, it's all right! You'll be fine, *Mother*!

This mist can be 'directed'. So it won't get close to you."

As Jack said, the enveloping mist, which had already gained a deep color, left a blank space in the area around Reika.

"Now -- it's just up to us to finish them off one by one.

We're off, *Mother*."

Jack said in a leisurely tone as she ran off with a knife in one hand.

*

Akagami Finance was, simply put, a black-market lender.

They lend people money with a smile, and then take away all that they own with wicked faces.

Even in this line of work, they were well-known for their tough collection methods, making use of their advantanges as a still-active crime syndicate.

"Hey, Mr Murano? Hate to tell you this, but you keep this up, and you're gonna have to sell off a few organs. You get what I'm saying? And I'll make it clear so even a moron can understand. What I'm saying here is, you're gonna have to off yourself, sell your organs and use your insurance money just to pay off the damn interest!

Hey, you listening to me? I'm asking you -- huh?"

Alas.

Rikudou Reika just happened to have read about a news report on illegal loans posted in a magazine --

"What the hell? Is there a fire...?"

And Reika just happening to know their address was what brought them to this tragedy.

Upon breathing in the dense cloud of enveloping smoke, they fainted from the pain.

"Gaah...!"

"Ugh... I, I can't... breathe..."

"S-Someone! The window! Get a window open -- !"

A strongly acidic smog surrounded them.

It was such a thing that simply breathing in it would burn the throat, and simply opening the eyes would cause them to fester.

"This hurts... shit, this hurts, help! Help!

Help me! Someone help me! Anyone -- !"

The frenzied man quickly ran into the leg of a desk and fell clumsily to the floor.

"I... have to get out of here...!"

Get out? But to where? Where could he run?

They themselves had not realized it, but those who tried to escape were deceived by the mist, and simply ran circles around the same place.

"Ha!"

The voice of a young girl, ill-suited to this company, suddenly rang out.

"Gheh -- "

And, leaving behind this ridiculous squeal -- a colleague collapsed before him.

"Wha-- who...?!"

The words of the man, whose throat had been hideously burnt, could not be heard as anything but rasping noises.

"A killer."

Even so, the light voice of the girl answered.

-- A killer?

The hell does that mean, the man thought. Anyway, his eyes and throat were in pain, unbearably so.

He was suffocating as he could not breathe.

His eyes hurt and he could not see a thing.

He wanted someone to hurry and come to ease his pain.

Please, stop this pain for me.

Let me be at peace, let me be at peace, let me be at peace -- guoh.

Jack, wielding the knife skillfully, dissected his body.

"Prana -- replenished. Heart -- gulp."

She swallowed the heart that had had terror etched into its bloodstream.

Looking around her, she located a new target.

"Hmmmm... found you!'

"Hiiih -- !!"

As Jack's stomach still complained of considerable hunger, she drew the hearts out of every single one of them, and finally managed to fill herself comfortably.

*

"Thank you for the meal."

"You're welcome."

By the time Jack returned, the mist had cleared.

"Well then, let's go home."

At Reika's words, Jack abruptly stopped.

Staring blankly, the girl posed a question to Reika.

"...We're, going home?"

"That's right. Was there something else you wanted to do?"

"No, nothing else. We just... thought it was strange, going home."

"Why is that?"

"-- We, had no home."

The girl remembered the alleyways, shrouded in mist and stench.

The nests, covered in waste and feces, where filthy rats ran about, were most certainly not a place of rest.

When you sleep at night, someone may attack you. When you wake up in the morning, someone may have died -- that's the kind of world it was.

That was why she could not help but feel that 'going home' was an occasion that had nothing to do with her.

The girl explained this clumsily.

"I see... so that's why."

Reika looked fixedly at the crestfallen girl.

...Her own self, for whom the feeling of being alive was as sparse as mist.

...The girl, for whom the word "alive" may not even be applicable.

According to the girl, it was often that Servants and Masters have the same disposition.

In that case, this meeting was, in a way -- fate, perhaps.

"*Mother*...?"

"...It's nothing. Now, let's go back. But before that, do you mind if we stop at a supermarket?"

"We'll be spirit form, so we don't really mind... why, though?"

"I thought we'd buy some ingredients for dinner."

"Dinner...?"

"Yes. I'm thinking of making hamburger steaks."

"What's that?"

Jack tilted her head innocently. It would seem that the problem for her was not whether she liked or disliked it, but what this dish called 'hamburger steaks' even was.

"They're very delicious. Why not eat with me, since you're here?"

"Um, meals aren't necessary for Servants. We'll be fine even if... we don't eat."

Though Jack had said that it was all right, she looked glum in some way.

"Oh, can you not eat?"

"We can, but..."

Meals aren't necessary for Servants. However, this did not mean that they had no sense of taste.

In that case, what was needed -- was a good taste, and curiosity, perhaps.

"It tastes great. What if I said it's a reward for your good work?"

"....Okay!"

At Reika's words, a big smile appeared on Jack the Ripper's face, and she danced around in an expression of joy.

As she watched that smile, she thought of one wish for when she reached the Holy Grail.

'I wish to be happy.'

It was a wish so very pure, so very sincere, and so very guileless -- and as such, it was a small wish that could never be granted to the killer and her mother.

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